Approved For Release 2006/07/25 : CIA-RDP91-00901R000600420020-7

ASSOCIATED PRESS
28 September 1984

REAGAN - INTELLIGENCE
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WASHINGTON

President Reagan telephoned former President Carter today to say that Reagan was not trying to blame the Carter administration for the Sept. 20 bombing of the U.S. Embassy annex in Beiruit, a White House official said.

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The official, who spoke only on condition that he not be identified, quoted Reagan as telling Carter:

"I was not suggesting that you or your administration was responsible for the decline in intelligence-gathering capability and I certainly did not suggest that your administration was the cause of what happened at the embassy in Beirut."

There was no word of any response by Carter, who was at his home in Plains, Ga. The telephone call, which the official described as "an explanation" of Reagan's controversial remarks about the fatal bombing, lasted four minutes.

An outpouring of criticism from Carter, his CIA chief and a host of angry Democrats greeted Reagan's comments in Bowling Green, Ohio, on Wednesday, when he was asked about plans to increase security at U.S. embassies after the third fatal bombing attack against U.S. installations in Lebanon in the past 17 months.

Reagan replied that the United States was "feeling the effects today of the near-destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years, before we came" into office in 1981.

Carter and others accused Reagan of trying to evade responsibility for the latest Beirut bombing. Reagan replied that his remarks were distorted by the news media.

The White House official said Reagan told Carter today that he believed his remarks had been misinterpreted and that he was talking about the "decade-long decline in human intelligence-gathering capability."

The official said Reagan "wanted to be absolutely sure" that Carter understood his position, and that Reagan said he "could understand how Carter misunderstood what the president was saying."

Meanwhile, the administration pressed its request in Congress for $110 million immediately and a total of $366 million in the coming year as part of a five-year, $1.5 billion plan to defend foreign posts against future attacks. Last week's suicide bombing at the new embassy annex in Lebanon killed 14 people, including two Americans.

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